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ABSTRACT

Studies indicate that American students have an inadequate understanding of world affairs, with implications for United States national security, business interests in foreign markets, and education in general, and specific recommendations have been made for the improvement of foreign language instruction. Foreign language education in the 1980s reflects fundamental changes in philosophy and objectives, and leaders in foreign language education agree that the fundamental objective is the ability to use language in meaningful ways. With this shift in approach, changes are necessary in program content, instructional materials, and learning activities. Innovations include elementary school programs emphasizing language use in real-life situations, immersion, exploratory programs, schools of international studies, the international baccalaureate, and instruction beyond the classroom. The global education movement in social studies has been especially relevant for foreign language study, and technological applications in foreign language instruction are being updated to emphasize communication. Another current emphasis is on assessment of language proficiency. Improvement in preservice teacher education, while indicated, has been difficult, but a variety of inservice development options are available, and professional associations are an important source of assistance. A need exists for additional research and promotion of public awareness of foreign language study. (MSE)

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FASTBACK

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Issues and Innovations in Foreign Language Education

Jacqueline Benevento

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Issues and Innovations in Foreign Language Education

by
Jacqueline Benevento

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Introduction and Background

Our American heritage owes its richness and diversity to peoples of different language backgrounds from every part of the globe, yet most Americans remain monolingual. In today's interdependent world, the need for knowledge of foreign languages is greater than ever before, but fewer than one out of five American secondary school students studies a foreign language; and fewer than one out of 20 studies it past the second year, or long enough to develop usable skills.

Foreign language study has not enjoyed favored status in twentieth century American schools. At the turn of the century, one-half of all high school students studied Latin, then considered a requisite for the intellectual rigors of the university, and about one-quarter were enrolled in French or German. By 1922, overall high school enrollments in foreign languages had fallen to 55%, divided about equally among Latin, French, and Spanish.

The 1930s and 1940s saw a precipitous decline in enrollments in all language courses. The geographical isolation of the country, coupled with the desire of first- and second-generation Americans to shake off all ties to the old country, led to a spirit of ethnocentrism. It seemed unnecessary, even undesirable, for most people to study a foreign language, much less learn to speak it. During the Great Depression the high school curriculum was viewed pragmatically as preparation for the world of work, whereas modern foreign language study was considered, as Latin had been, as preparation for college for the elite. By 1948 only 21% of the high school population was enrolled in any foreign language. Spanish and Latin enrolled 8% each, French less than 5%, and German less than 1%.

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With the technological advances of the 1950s, it became apparent that the United States was no longer isolated from events on the earth or in space. With the support of federal funding, there was a flurry of interest to increase foreign language study. Secondary school enrollments rose to more than 27% by 1965, with Spanish the most popular language, followed by French, Latin, and German. With the availability of audio equipment, such as language labs, and the dissemination of new research in linguistics, teachers were encouraged to stress listening and speaking, which was a departure from the grammar study and translation emphasis of earlier years.

The late 1960s saw a new decline in enrollments as funding disappeared and as many colleges abolished language entrance requirements. In 1966, 34% of the colleges had required a foreign language for entrance; by 1975, this figure had dropped to 18%. Also, foreign language requirements for a bachelor's degree were reduced; enrollments dropped by almost half between 1968 and 1977, when only 8% of American college students were studying a foreign language. In 1983 the college enrollment also was about 8%. By 1978, the high school enrollment had fallen to 17.8%, where it stabilized. It has now begun to rise again. A 1982 survey conducted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) shows that approximately 19% of students in grades 7 to 12 were enrolled in foreign language classes.

This same 1982 ACTFL survey also reported percentages of the total foreign language high school enrollment. Spanish remained the most popular at 54%. French retained second place at 30%. German kept third place at 9%. Latin was 5%, Italian 2%, and Russian less than 1%. A dozen other languages were taught, but all with very limited enrollments.

A comparison of high school enrollments in 1948 and 1982 would seem to indicate there has not been much change, since the enrollment figure of about 20% remains the same. Furthermore, most of the students who do study a foreign language still study for only two years. Nevertheless, the future looks bright. Enrollments, although still low, are on the increase in both high schools and colleges. Foreign language entrance and degree requirements are being restored in colleges and universities throughout the nation in response to a score of national

studies calling for higher educational standards. Government, business, and industry are recognizing the importance of a knowledge of foreign languages and cultures. In addition, the rise of multi-ethnic awareness has given further impetus to the study of languages and cultures.

Even though nine out of ten Americans cannot speak, read, or understand any language but English, there is apparent public interest in the study of foreign languages. A national survey conducted by the University of Michigan in 1979 showed that 50% of Americans wished they could speak a foreign language; 90% thought foreign languages should be taught in the secondary school; and 75% thought they should be taught in the elementary school.

The renewed interest in foreign language study raises several questions that this fastback will address:

- Why study foreign languages?
- What is new in foreign language teaching?
- What does it mean to be proficient in a foreign language?
- How are foreign language teachers prepared?
- What is the status of research in foreign language education?
- How can public awareness and support be built for foreign language study?

The Need for Foreign Language Study

Events of the recent past have made it clear that we live in an interdependent world that demands a knowledge of the other languages and cultures of the world. In 1979 President Carter's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies report, *Strength Through Wisdom*, received widespread media coverage. It called the lack of foreign language competence in the U.S. "scandalous," and directly linked to this language incompetence was a lack of understanding of world affairs, with grave implications for American national security and business interests.

Various studies have indicated that American students have an inadequate understanding of world affairs. In one study, more than 40% of twelfth-graders could not locate Egypt, and more than 20% could not locate France or China. In a UNESCO study of 30,000 ten- and fourteen-year-olds in nine countries, American students ranked next to last in comprehension of foreign cultures. College students did not fare much better; in a 1980 survey of global understanding conducted by the Educational Testing Service, they answered on the average only half the questions correctly.

Several other publications appeared subsequent to the release of the President's Commission report, notably *The Tongue-Tied American* by Congressman Paul Simon of Illinois, relating unfortunate occurrences and highlighting serious dangers in the fields of international business and diplomacy due to the ineptness of Americans in other languages and cultures.

Implications for National Security

A few items from these sources about the American lack of language

competence will illustrate implications for national security. Both the National Security Agency and the Foreign Service have difficulty in filling positions requiring language skills, especially those requiring the less commonly taught languages such as Chinese and Arabic. When a Russian sought political asylum in the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, he could not find anyone who spoke Russian. At the height of the Iran hostage crisis, there were few staff members in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran who spoke Farsi. When the Angola crisis developed, only two Americans with knowledge about the country were available to U.S. government officials. In Kenya, only one U.S. Embassy officer was required to speak Swahili.

Without language proficiency the potential for misunderstandings in diplomacy is great. Sometimes errors are downright embarrassing. When President Carter was in Poland, a remark in his speech about learning the opinions and understanding the desires of the Poles for the future was improperly translated as a desire to know them *carnally*.

Implications for Business Interests

The problems of language incompetence in U.S. international business are likewise disturbing. Stories abound, which although amusing, point out our ineptness with foreign languages. For example, in advertising for General Motors cars in Belgium, "body by Fisher" was translated into Flemish as "corpse by Fisher," which did not help sales. "Come alive with Pepsi" almost appeared in the Chinese edition of *Reader's Digest* as "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave." In Germany, the same ad slogan came out in translation as "Come alive out of the grave." The Chevrolet Nova didn't sell well in Latin America until its name was changed to Caribe, which isn't too surprising since "no va" in Spanish means "it doesn't go."

Incidents such as these are distressing in light of the international scope of American business, industry, and agriculture. In 1983 imports and exports accounted for almost one-quarter of the gross national product; one of every six jobs was linked to international trade; and one-third of our agricultural acreage was devoted to exports. The lack of language competence in order to do business in foreign markets obviously can be very costly.

Implications for Education

The U.S. continues to be the only nation in the world where one can graduate from college without ever having studied a foreign language. Recently, several critiques of American schooling have included recommendations that would change this state of affairs. In *A Nation at Risk*, the President's Commission on Excellence in Education recommended foreign language proficiency for all students and suggested that this study begin in elementary school, with two years of additional high school study for the college-bound. The College Board's Project Equality report, *Academic Preparation for College*, also called for foreign language study as a basic requirement for college entrance. The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy recommended an opportunity for proficiency in a second language for all students. *High School*, the report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching by Ernest Boyer, urged that all students become familiar with the language of another culture.

At the basis of all these recommendations is the recognition that learning another language is, and always has been, an essential part of a liberal education. Roger Bacon, the medieval scholar, noted that the conquest of learning is achieved through the knowledge of languages. Goethe, the eighteenth century German poet and dramatist, stated that people do not really know their own language until they learn another. Ezra Pound, the twentieth century poet, observed that all wisdom is not contained in any one language.

There are obvious benefits of foreign language ability in expanded opportunities for careers. A recent review of employment ads over a two-month period revealed more than 130 ads seeking employees with foreign language skills. However, the benefits of foreign language study go far beyond getting a job. For all students, the opportunity to study another language and culture can lead to a better understanding of the human condition in an interdependent world. In learning about another language and culture, we also better understand our own. The study of other languages and cultures is a way to enlightened citizenship.

Recommendations and Responses

The 1979 report of the President's Commission on Foreign Language

and International Studies made several specific recommendations to correct inadequacies in foreign language education in our country. Among these, it called for the reinstatement of foreign language requirements in schools and colleges, the establishment of special high schools for intensive programs in foreign language and international studies, and upgrading these programs in colleges. Improvements in teacher training were urged at both preservice and inservice levels, including federally funded regional centers in this country and summer institutes abroad. The Commission asked for more interesting program content and more effective instruction in the classroom. Every state was counseled to establish advisory councils involving foreign language specialists to study the problem and develop model programs that infuse international education into the schools. The development of proficiency tests to measure student progress was recommended, as well as incentive funding to encourage foreign language study at all levels.

All these recommendations present a challenge to the language teaching profession. In the past few years the professional organizations have moved to implement the proposals of the President's Commission and other similar reports. The National Council on Foreign Language and International Studies (NCFLIS) was established in direct response to the President's Commission report. With headquarters in New York City, NCFLIS serves as a clearinghouse and resource center on all matters concerning foreign language and international studies at all levels of education. Another national group, the Joint National Commission for Languages (JNCL) founded by the major language associations in 1972, added a legislative liaison branch, the Council for Languages and Other International Studies (CLOIS), and expanded operations with offices in Washington, D.C. JNCL/CLOIS serves as a forum for language associations in the planning of national policies and the identification of national needs in foreign language and international studies.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) prepared a joint statement endorsing their mutual cooperation, and in 1983 the national conferences of both associations were held simultaneously in San Francisco. In addition, ACTFL has taken part in cooperative activities with Global Perspectives in Education, Inc. Also on the national

scene, both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have affirmed the importance of foreign language and international studies in the total educational process.

At the state level, foreign language teachers have taken an active role in task forces and commissions dealing with foreign language and international studies. As of this writing, 23 states have taken various actions, with 12 concluding studies and eight considering legislation. Some states are considering a foreign language requirement for high school graduation for all students, and others a requirement for college-bound students. As one example of state action, the New York Board of Regents will require all students by the end of grade nine to have studied one year of a foreign language by 1992 and two years by 1994. All high school students seeking a Regents diploma beginning in 1985 will have to study a foreign language for three years. In Louisiana, as of 1985, a foreign language will be required of all academically able students beginning in grade four, and by 1989 in grades four through eight. Some cities have also set requirements. New York City requires one year of foreign language study for all high school students; Baltimore requires the study of French or Spanish beginning in grade four.

Foreign language teachers have played an important part in the deliberations of the President's Commission and in the various state and city task forces and have accepted responsibility for identifying weaknesses in their own field. Although there are many outstanding foreign language programs, teachers acknowledge the following problems: 1) inappropriate content, outdated materials, and ineffective methods; 2) inconsistent standards on measures of language proficiency; 3) weak teacher training programs; 4) limited development and dissemination of research; and 5) poor communication to students and the public in general about the importance of foreign language study. These problems summarize the issues in foreign language education today, and foreign language teachers are responding to these problems in creative and innovative ways.

Foreign Language Teaching Today

Foreign language education in the 1980s reflects fundamental changes in philosophy and objectives.

- Foreign language study no longer is viewed merely as an esoteric college-entrance requirement for the elite but as an effective way for all students to learn about another language and culture and thus better understand their own.
- The study of foreign languages, once seen as necessary for only a few careers such as language teaching, translating, and interpreting, is now considered an important ancillary skill for many careers in diverse fields.
- The traditional two-year course, proven insufficient to acquire usable skills, is giving way to longer sequences and varied organizational patterns designed to respond to differing student purposes.
- Foreign languages are no longer considered as isolated from the mainstream of schooling but as a fundamental study in the humanities, with interdisciplinary connections to other fields.
- The study of foreign languages does not involve merely learning about culture through its great literature and art but is concerned essentially with learning about beliefs, values, and ways of life.

In the past 25 years a number of factors has resulted in a shift in foreign language education away from language analysis and toward language use. On the world scene, technological developments have brought events of other countries directly into our homes. With the recognition of global interdependence, foreign languages and cultures are not so foreign any more. At the same time, researchers have developed

theories about the nature of communication, which have found wide application. The new field of psycholinguistics explicates theories about the nature of language and its acquisition, while the new field of sociolinguistics reveals the interrelationship of language with social contexts.

Influenced by all these factors, leaders in foreign language education have agreed that the fundamental objective of language learning is the ability to use language in meaningful ways, that is, to communicate, and that the teaching of communication deals with the ability to interact with people in the situations of their respective cultures.

The Need for Change

With this shift in foreign language teaching away from language analysis and toward language use, it is clear that changes are necessary in program content, instructional materials, and learning activities. Content must be based on the concept that languages reflect cultures and cultures influence languages. Materials must present authentic language within the framework of authentic cultural situations. Students must have opportunities for appropriate practice.

There are many problems in the implementation of these new ideas. Courses of study that simply list a sequence of grammatical topics are inadequate; cultural topics also must be provided and their interrelationships specified. Attention also must be given to the various places in the world where the language is spoken. Textbooks, which generally serve as the content and instructional basis of classroom teaching, are showing improvements. Most now reflect the use of authentic language in everyday situations in locations around the world. However, too many still contain "too much between the covers to cover," presenting too much grammar analysis, too little culture analysis, and too few communicative activities. In addition, the cost of authentic supplementary materials from foreign countries is prohibitive for most schools. A further problem is that almost half the foreign language classes in this country are multi-level, that is, classes in which two or even three levels of the same language are taught in the same room at the same time.

Much has been written about recommended changes in program design and instruction, but there are no quick and easy answers when it comes to implementation. There are no definitive models to follow and

no cookbook formulas. Much research remains to be done, but there are many examples of outstanding programs and practices. Fifty such quality programs are described in *Award-Winning Foreign Language Programs*, published by ACTFL in 1981. Additional innovative practices are described below. This list is by no means complete because of lack of space, but it provides a sampling of innovations that attest to the creativity and dedication of language teachers all over the country.

Some Innovative Programs

FLES. Foreign language in the elementary school (FLES), very much in the forefront in the 1960s, never totally disappeared and now is making a comeback. The language is taught for a specified period of time for a certain number of days per week. A frequent pattern is 20 minutes three times per week, although there are many variations, including before or after the regular school day. FLES programs generally are organized in response to community interest and thus vary from school to school. There are few published materials. Usually teachers must create most of their materials themselves.

The new FLES programs are avoiding the errors that caused the demise of the programs of the 1960s. There is now an emphasis on the use of language in real-life situations, which was missing from earlier programs. In addition, language and culture content are usually integrated with content in reading, geography, music, art, and other subjects. The objective today is progress toward skill development and cultural awareness. Fluency is neither promised nor expected as an outcome. It is not known just how many FLES programs exist, but there are probably a great many throughout the nation.

Immersion. In immersion programs, students study their regular subjects, such as math and science, using the foreign language as the medium of instruction. Immersion programs may take place at any level but usually are found in the elementary school. Total immersion programs typically follow the Canadian model, in which only the foreign language is used in kindergarten and grades one and perhaps two. A language arts class taught in English is introduced in grade two or three; and the use of English is increased little by little, so that by the end of grade six, one-quarter to one-half of the classes are taught in English.

The objective of total immersion is functional proficiency, in which students are able to communicate as well as their native counterparts in countries where the language is spoken. There are also partial immersion programs, in which the foreign language is used for only some of the classes from the beginning. The goal of partial immersion is also proficiency, but to a lesser degree.

A recent study compared foreign language achievement in FLES, total immersion, and partial immersion. As might be expected, students in total immersion did better than students in partial immersion, who did better than students in FLES. The study clearly showed that amount of exposure has a measurable effect on performance. Studies in Canada over a 10-year period have shown that English-speaking students in French-immersion classes suffer no ill effects on their performance in all subject matter areas, and they even perform better than their non-immersion peers in English vocabulary and reading comprehension tests. There is also a growing body of research in the U.S. showing that parents approve of immersion programs and that children do not lose their English language skills.

Immersion programs require highly qualified teachers, preferably native speakers. There is an additional problem with the availability of instructional materials. Some foreign-published materials are available but often are not appropriate in the American classroom. Immersion programs are growing rapidly and now exist in several places: Cincinnati in Spanish, French, and German; San Diego in French and Spanish; Montgomery County, Maryland, in French and Spanish; and San Francisco in Chinese.

FLEX. Foreign language exploratory programs, or FLEX, are also back in the news. These programs also differ from those of the past. The old exploratory programs, usually presented in grade seven or eight, consisted of a little grammar and reading in French, German, Spanish, and Latin, each presented in isolation. The objective of FLEX is to introduce youngsters to the idea of foreign languages and cultures and to help them make more informed choices about subsequent foreign language study.

The new programs often take place as early as grade five or six, in addition to grade seven or eight. Typically one or two semesters in length,

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they integrate culture and sometimes present the uncommonly taught languages, such as Japanese. Some programs also deal with language groups of the world, cross-cultural comparisons, and the use of languages in careers. Since very little exists in published materials, FLEX requires teachers willing to create their own materials. There are carefully developed FLEX programs in many places, particularly in Prince George's County, Maryland, and in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Schools of International Studies. These are secondary schools, either single magnet schools or schools-within-a-school, where foreign languages are integrated with English and social studies, as well as other subjects. These multidisciplinary programs have high standards and are intended to provide a background for careers in international trade and government. Off-campus field work usually is required in businesses and agencies involved in international affairs. Examples of schools of international studies are: the School of International Studies, Hillcrest High School, Jamaica, New York; the Glenbrook Academy of International Studies, Glenview and Northbrook, Illinois; the International Studies Academy, Cincinnati, Ohio; and the Alternative High Schools of International Studies, New Orleans, Shreveport, and Lake Charles, Louisiana.

The International Baccalaureate. Approximately 60 public and private schools in the United States and Canada offer the International Baccalaureate program to academically talented students. This program consists of courses of study and examinations taken in the junior and senior years of high school, which lead to a diploma accepted in universities throughout the world. Students in the Cincinnati International Studies Academy, for example, may work toward the International Baccalaureate.

Beyond the Classroom. Foreign language teachers continue to take students on trips abroad, organize dinners and fairs, and encourage pen pals. In addition, there are some new activities taking place. Weekend and one- or two-week summer language camps are enjoying great success in various parts of the country. Immersed in the foreign language in an informal setting, students engage in a variety of activities designed to heighten cross-cultural awareness. Outstanding programs in several languages, including Norwegian, are operated by Concordia College in

Minnesota; a periodic newsletter is available. Some schools arrange exchange programs abroad with school attendance and homestay for short periods of time. There are careful preparation and follow-up activities. An excellent exchange program is found, for example, at Melrose High School, Melrose, Massachusetts.

Global Education and Foreign Languages

The global education movement in the social studies field has particular relevance for foreign language education since the study of cultures is the responsibility of both fields. There have been some noteworthy examples of interdisciplinary cooperation. Project LEARN, a regional educational service center in Connecticut, has brought together foreign language and social studies teachers to develop units for the middle school on the cultures of French-speaking Africa and Spanish-speaking Latin America. In Bernards High School, Bernardsville, N.J., foreign language and social studies teachers plan cooperative units and share resources.

Organizational patterns in many secondary schools make it difficult to integrate the two fields, but there are ways to achieve global education objectives within the foreign language classroom. Teachers can examine textbooks and other instructional materials for content to increase cross-cultural understandings and decrease stereotypic and ethnocentric perceptions. They also can include universal themes in their courses, such as food, housing, the arts, social and economic organization, education, and value systems. The important point is that integrating global perspectives into foreign language courses must be consciously planned. Excellent suggestions for infusing global perspectives into foreign language programs at all levels can be found in the 1981 *Northeast Conference Report on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*. Also, the National Council for Foreign Language and International Studies has published a helpful reference titled *Internationalizing Your School*, which presents suggestions, resources, and sample programs.

Technology

The use of records, tapes, slides, and filmstrips has been com-

monplace for several years in foreign language classrooms. These materials are now being updated in order to emphasize communication. Commercially prepared recordings now contain listening comprehension exercises and tests using native voices and authentic sound effects. Feature films are also available but are not as popular as other media, mostly because they were not designed for instruction. Several years ago, a few sets of short 16mm films were available, produced in the United States and filmed on location in foreign countries. These films were ideal for classroom use but are now outdated. Similar productions on videocassette would be very useful.

Video offers all the advantages of film and is much easier to use, but there is a lack of programs available for the foreign language class that present authentic language and culture. Videotapes of foreign language instructional programs produced abroad are generally not available because of copyright regulations and often are not compatible with existing hardware. Currently, videotape equipment in schools seems to be used mostly for in-house productions in which students develop, perform in, and film their own programs. An innovative use of videotape was reported in the Wissahickon School District in Ambler, Pa., where students exchanged videotapes with a school in Germany.

An exciting development with implications for the teaching of language and culture is the transmission of foreign television programs directly by satellite. Satellite TV can also provide two-way, audio-video communication between classrooms in the U.S. and cultural situations around the world. An organization devoted to the educational use of satellite TV, the National Committee for Internationalizing Education Through Satellites, has its headquarters at the University of Pennsylvania. In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the use of interactive cable TV makes it possible to link several schools and offer languages at different levels to students that would not otherwise have the chance to study them.

Shortwave radio programs provide a good source of authentic material; but because they tend to be broadcast during out-of-school times, they must be recorded for use in the classroom. However, the level of language is too advanced for beginners. On the other hand, radio programs presented by the foreign language departments of local univer-

sities are ideal. Such programs usually consist of interviews with foreign students, popular music recordings from the foreign country, poetry readings, and even some direct instruction.

The language laboratories of the 1960s generally have suffered an unhappy fate in the schools. Students grew to dislike them because the drill materials were merely repetitious and did not involve them in communication. Many teachers disliked them because they distrusted the technology they were forced to use. Disenchantment set in when it was recognized that the technology by itself did not cause learning to take place. As the old equipment wore out, many labs were dismantled because there were insufficient funds to maintain and modernize them or to purchase improved materials. However, the language laboratory concept is not passé; to the contrary, a lab with technological advances can truly be a learning resource center. Some labs, particularly at the college level, have been modernized with the addition of microcomputers and video screens.

Microcomputers are appearing with increasing frequency in U.S. schools. Computer-assisted instruction has been an important topic at foreign language conferences for the past five years or so. The interactive capabilities of the computer make it a particularly useful tool for individualized drill and remedial instruction. In some schools, students are preparing their own drill programs, which has proven to be a highly motivating experience. Much of the commercially produced software available at present is largely for grammar and vocabulary drill and is often of dubious quality. More sophisticated programs are being developed that deal with translation, reading comprehension, writing, and simulations of cultural situations. As it becomes easier to program a computer and as teachers become more skilled in using computers, higher quality programs will appear in the schools.

Defining and Measuring Proficiency

Proficiency is a central concept in language study. Proficiency means the ability to use language to do things, to use language in social situations, in short, to communicate. This emphasis on communication means that foreign language programs must include proficiency objectives. A survey of foreign language teachers conducted for ACTFL in 1981 found strong support across the country for proficiency objectives and proficiency testing. Since that time, an emphasis on proficiency has become, in the view of some foreign language educators, the most important trend in their field today.

With the acceptance of proficiency as a fundamental goal of foreign language instruction, the problem for the profession became one of defining the levels of language proficiency and measuring their attainment. One model of a proficiency test is that used by the Foreign Service Institute since 1956 and subsequently endorsed by the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR), a group of approximately 30 government agencies involved in foreign language teaching. This is an interview conducted by specially trained personnel, which rates examinees on a scale from 0, indicating no functional ability, to 5, indicating proficiency at the level of a native educated speaker. Each level has a specific set of criteria.

Designed to evaluate the performance of adult government professionals, the ILR scale was not appropriate for assessing oral proficiency in school foreign language programs because it did not discriminate progress at the lower end. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) had been engaged for some time in responding to this need and

had modified the scale without changing the original definitions of proficiency levels. Three subdivisions in the 0 range were established and designated as novice level; three in the 1 range were designated as intermediate; and two in the 2 level were designated advanced. Since the ILR rating of 3 satisfied all professional requirements, all ratings of 3 and above were designated as superior. ACTFL undertook to disseminate this scale and to train teachers in its use. It has since become known as the ACTFL/ETS scale.

Each of the subdivisions contains a set of statements that describe what a speaker is able to express in terms of functions, possible content, and degree of accuracy. The titles of the subdivisions are as follows:

- Novice-low: Unable to function in the spoken language
- Novice-mid: Able to operate in a very limited capacity within very predictable areas of need
- Novice-high: Able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances
- Intermediate-low: Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements
- Intermediate-mid: Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands
- Intermediate-high: Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands
- Advanced: Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
- Advanced Plus: Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence
- Superior: Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary and to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics

Recently, ACTFL has trained college teachers to conduct and rate oral proficiency interviews and has held a summer institute for secondary school teachers on the application of the theme of oral proficiency to foreign language programs. ACTFL and ETS continue to collaborate

in presenting oral proficiency workshops in schools and colleges and at professional meetings at national, regional, and state levels.

ACTFL also has developed proficiency guidelines for the skills of listening, reading, and writing, and for culture areas, using the proficiency levels established for the speaking proficiency scale. In addition, ACTFL has developed language-specific guidelines for French, German, and Spanish; guidelines are in process for Chinese, Japanese, and Russian.

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines suggest that teaching and testing for proficiency must be based on the actual use of language in lifelike situations. The guidelines also assume that proficiency develops along a continuum in the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing and in cultural competence, and that these areas can be evaluated along this continuum.

By way of illustration, a student at the "advanced" level of proficiency could be expected to:

- Speak with confidence in daily social situations about such topics as shopping, traveling, school, the family, pastimes
- Understand face-to-face conversations about everyday matters; comprehend enough to enjoy films, television, radio; talk on the telephone
- Read social correspondence, signs, advertising, announcements; understand short newspaper and magazine articles on familiar topics; read uncomplicated material for pleasure
- Write letters, post cards, phone messages; complete routine forms; take notes; prepare short narratives and descriptions expressing facts and opinions
- Participate successfully in such everyday social situations as accepting and refusing invitations, offering and refusing gifts, paying and accepting compliments; comprehend common rules of etiquette and nonverbal behaviors

To reach the "advanced" level will obviously take considerably longer than the traditional two-year high school program. Although every student may not study a language long enough to attain "advanced" proficiency, the guidelines can provide teachers with a consistent basis for

determining student progress toward proficiency goals at all levels. Using the guidelines, teachers can develop their own appropriate tests to measure progress.

While assessment techniques for speaking proficiency have received a great deal of attention, much work remains to be done in developing techniques for the other three skill areas and culture. Ongoing research projects in proficiency will be a major focus at the Model Regional Center for Proficiency-Based Foreign Language Education, recently established at the University of Pennsylvania. The first of an envisioned national network, the center also will provide teacher training and offer consultation on proficiency-related matters. It is clear that the proficiency movement has far-reaching implications for program design and instruction, for the selection and use of classroom materials, for student evaluation and placement, and for teacher preparation and certification.

Teacher Preparation in Foreign Language Education

In 1981 ACTFL conducted a survey to determine opinions of secondary school foreign language teachers about their preparation, professional growth, and workloads. The survey revealed that teachers rated the major areas of their preservice education in the following order of importance: study in a foreign country, student teaching, foreign language courses, education courses. About half had studied in a foreign country during college. Regarding foreign language credits earned at the undergraduate level, 35% were in language and linguistics, 45% in literature, and 15% in culture and civilization (the remaining 5% was not reported in the survey). When asked what they felt was lacking most in their preparation, respondents emphasized conversation practice, methods courses, information about classroom management, and cultural learnings, in that order.

Clearly, improvements in preservice preparation are indicated, but the conditions confronting the language teaching profession have made improvements difficult. The number of foreign language teaching positions has decreased in both schools and colleges as foreign language enrollments have declined. For this reason fewer teacher candidates are being prepared. In some institutions, prospective foreign language teachers have had to take their methods courses with classmates in other subject-matter areas. In others, foreign language education faculty members have been released, as have faculty members in language departments; some languages have lost departmental status in colleges and universities. The move in some states to grant teaching certificates to liberal arts graduates without methods courses and student teaching has

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also caused concern. Now, however, with foreign language enrollments increasing, there is a strong likelihood of a shortage of qualified teachers.

Despite the negative conditions of the recent past, there have been, and continue to be, exemplary foreign language preservice programs across the nation. At Temple University students learn to apply interaction analysis to classroom behaviors within the specific context of foreign language instruction, thus learning how to identify problem areas and how to remedy them. In particular, students learn techniques for conducting conversational activities that emphasize the personalized and humanistic aspects of communication. At the University of Georgia emphasis is placed on the teaching of culture by means of such imaginative techniques as culture capsules, culture clusters, culture assimilators, "cultoons," mini-dramas, and microdialogues. In Texas, a state mandate has been proposed that would require future foreign language teachers to demonstrate oral proficiency for certification. Activities are now under way to train college language faculty in oral interview and proficiency rating techniques. One result of this project will be a proficiency-based model for teacher certification that could be used in other states.

Although there are many good programs, foreign language education specialists agree that many improvements are needed in both the content and methods of preservice programs.

Increased proficiency in the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is essential for foreign language teachers, with the oral skills paramount. Achievement in the skills should be demonstrated by proficiency tests, not by accumulating course credits. The current undergraduate emphasis on reading and analysis of literature may be too heavy, given that literary study does not play a correspondingly large part in school foreign language programs.

Cultural learnings should be gained using current and authentic materials, such as advertisements, films, magazines, and newspapers. Study and residence abroad should be required; a strong relationship has been found between ability in language use and residence abroad. Moreover, it stretches credibility to presume to teach the culture of a language group without having participated in that culture. In addition,

the growing emphasis on global education requires teachers to have more background in the political, social, and economic realities of the countries whose languages they teach.

Methods courses should include ways to maximize student interaction, provide for individual differences, effectively deal with errors, devise practice drills and other communication activities, assess proficiency, and use technology, all within the context of the foreign language classroom. Knowledge and application of research findings should also be a part of preservice programs. Clinical laboratory experiences in the schools should be incorporated sooner than the student teaching phase, and both must be carefully monitored by both college supervisory personnel and cooperating teachers. Preservice students also should be introduced to the community of foreign language teachers through familiarization with the various professional associations and their publications.

Inservice Education

Foreign language teachers can keep up-to-date with developments in their field by attending the numerous conferences presented by national, regional, and state associations. The 1981 ACTFL survey found that 20% of the teachers attended national conferences annually and another 20% attended every several years. About 40% to 50% attended state or regional conferences annually, and about 65% attended local meetings. Respondents considered the most important topics for inservice activities in order as follows: developing and maintaining their language skills, teaching multi-level classes, and developing and teaching innovative programs.

There are numerous professional journals and newsletters that provide a relatively inexpensive source of current information. About 70% of the teachers, based on the ACTFL survey, did read such publications monthly. However, reading is a lonely activity, whereas attending a conference allows one to share professional concerns with colleagues. A project titled "Academic Alliances: School/College Faculty Collaboratives" is responding to the need by establishing regional collaboratives of foreign language teachers at all levels of instruction, where participants meet on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual

interest. This project has its headquarters at the University of Pennsylvania. There are currently 73 collaboratives in 37 states, with more than 2,000 teachers involved.

About 30% of the teachers, based on the ACTFL survey, were able to travel abroad annually, with an additional 60% able to make a trip only every several years. Financial assistance for inservice study abroad is needed, where the emphasis should be on participation in the foreign culture rather than on course work. There is also a need for local colleges to offer seminars and workshops for teachers during after-school hours and on weekends, including short-term immersion experiences. In recent years two-week summer immersion institutes at Rider College in New Jersey have met with success.

Professional Associations

Professional associations are an important source of inservice education. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), founded in 1967, serves teachers at all levels of education in all languages, including the classics. ACTFL is classroom-oriented, specializing in pedagogy, pedagogical research, and public awareness. ACTFL publishes a journal, *Foreign Language Annals*, and *Public Awareness Newsletter*, and holds annual conferences and workshops.

The Modern Language Association (MLA), now more than 100 years old, is primarily a learned organization. Most of its members are at the college level, with two-thirds of them in English and the rest in foreign languages. The MLA publishes a scholarly journal emphasizing literary analysis and holds an annual conference.

There are also separate national associations for several of the languages, collectively referred to as the AATs: the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI), the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). Additional national associations include: the American Association of Teachers of Arabic, the American Classical League, the American Council of Teachers of Uncommonly Taught Asian Languages, the Association of Teachers of

Japanese, the Chinese Language Teachers Association, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, and the National Association for Bilingual Education. All these associations serve teachers at all levels with conferences and publications.

The *Modern Language Journal*, available by subscription, is not published by any of the above organizations. It is devoted to teaching methods, pedagogical research, and other topics of professional interest to foreign language teachers.

Three established regional conferences, which are not sponsored by membership organizations, hold annual meetings and periodic workshops. These are the Northeast Conference, the Southern Conference, and the Central States Conference. The Southwest Conference is newly organized. The Pacific Northwest Council, which is a membership organization, also holds conferences and workshops. Almost every state, as well as several larger cities, has a foreign language teachers association that holds meetings and publishes newsletters.

Research in Foreign Language Education

There is need for research in all areas of education and the field of language study is no exception. For example, research is needed to answer questions about the nature of language, the differences between native and foreign language learning, and the ways foreign languages can best be taught and learned. A comprehensive review is beyond the scope of this fastback, but a few examples of the kinds of studies undertaken recently will illustrate some current research directions and call attention to the need for more research and for teacher awareness of existing research.

There is a growing body of theoretical research hypothesizing how second languages are acquired and how they should be taught. Work is under way in testing these theories but much remains to be done. There are also some recent applied research studies with relevance for classroom instruction, dealing with the importance of early training on listening comprehension, the effect of visuals on reading and listening comprehension, and the validity and reliability of oral proficiency testing. Some descriptive studies also have been done on how native speakers perceive various student errors and on student learning strategies. There also have been some studies on the relationship of language achievement to learning styles and personality characteristics and on the relationship of student attitudes on various measures to classroom climate. Other recent studies compare the achievement in three modes of elementary school foreign language instruction and compare the SAT scores of students who have studied a foreign language with those who have not.

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Research on all dimensions of foreign language education is urgently needed. For example, there is a need for more descriptive studies of what actually goes on in classrooms: how time is used, and what teachers and students do if learning is to occur. There is also a need to study applications of the new technology and implications of the proficiency movement for teaching and testing.

Many teachers are indifferent to research results and their potential applications. This may be due to a lack of knowledge, but this state of affairs could be remedied through seminars and workshops, perhaps in university/school collaboratives. In addition, such collaboration between researchers and classroom teachers could lead to needed research involving actual classroom practices.

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Promoting Public Awareness for Foreign Language Study

While the need for foreign language study is clear to some government and business officials, education reformers, and foreign language teachers, it is not nearly so obvious to the general public. The foreign language teaching profession has been making efforts to raise the public consciousness and to build public support.

Foreign Language Week, first observed in 1957, takes place nationally during the first full week in March. Its purpose is to encourage language study in the schools and to raise public awareness of its importance. Proclamations of Foreign Language Week from the President and various state governors are published in professional journals, and special activities are planned, which are often reported in local newspapers. A favorite activity is a poster contest with entries displayed in local stores. Foreign Language Week kits containing activity suggestions, sample news releases, posters, and bumper stickers are available from ACTFL, the Northeast Conference, and some state departments of education.

A Public Awareness Network, established by ACTFL, enlists volunteers across the country to send magazine and newspaper articles pertaining to foreign language and international studies to a data bank for storage and dissemination. The *Public Awareness Newsletter*, published six times yearly by ACTFL and available by subscription, reports on current events, legislation, and other developments in foreign language and international studies. The *Newsletter* is very useful for getting information to policy makers at all levels of government and education.

The ACTFL Alert Network, composed of key people in every state, communicates information about legislation affecting foreign language and international studies across the country in order to rally support and to influence decision makers. The Alert Network works closely with the Joint National Committee for Languages and the Committee for Language and Other International Studies (JNCL/CLOIS) in Washington, D.C. With the support of the Alert Network and JNCL/CLOIS, several bills affecting language study have been introduced in Congress.

It is important that all people involved in education view foreign language study as in the mainstream of education. The cooperation of foreign language teachers with colleagues in the social studies and in global education has already been noted. For example, the Foreign Language Educators of New Jersey is one of 22 state education organizations that comprise the New Jersey Consortium for Global Education.

Much remains to be done to make the general public aware that foreign language study is essential to American education. There have been several favorable newspaper and magazine articles in the past few years, but as yet very little has been done in television and radio, the most effective media for reaching the largest number of people.

Satisfied students are probably the best advertisement for convincing the public of the value of foreign language study. When research informs practice, when teacher preparation improves, when classrooms are more interesting places, when proficiency becomes a realized goal, then students will advertise their satisfaction. Until that time, public awareness efforts aimed at all segments of the population — students, parents, educators, government officials, business and industry leaders, the general public — are needed in order to increase student enrollment in foreign language classes.

Information Sources

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
579 Broadway
Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706

Joint National Committee for Languages and Council for Languages and Other International Studies
3520 Prospect Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

National Council on Foreign Language and International Studies
605 Third Avenue, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10158

Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Box 623
Middlebury, VT 05753

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